

the Nazi doctors. The purpose of bioethics is to give theoretical weight to the proclamation of some of man's basic rights which began to be formulated after the 'universal declaration of the rights of man' in 1948, the 40th anniversary of which was recently celebrated.

And thus bioethics aims to study 'human conduct in the area of the life sciences and health care, insofar as this conduct is examined in the light of moral values and principles'.

This handbook of bioethics, by Professor Elio Sgreccia, the director of the first Italian University Centre for Bioethics, fits into that perspective. The handbook appears at a distance of two years from the first edition and it constitutes a revision and update of the first edition.

As the author explains in the preface, a re-elaboration of the previous volume has been necessary, because in the last few years important documents have been issued concerning problems of bioethics that could not be ignored. At the end of 1986, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued Recommendation number 1046 which touched on the delicate problem of the experimentation and use of human embryos in the biomedical field. In January 1987 the International Conference of the European Medical Associations approved the almost statutory document, 'European Principles of Medical Ethics' which deals with all the main points of bioethics. In the Catholic field, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has published the 'Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation', a document which expresses the position of the Catholic Church on the question of reproductive techniques and in the area of the very basis of bioethics (for example the clear definition of the human embryo's identity).

The first part of the handbook (chapters I-V), deals with the foundations and principles of bioethics, the problems of the origin of life, the centrality of the human being and the value of his physical existence and the position of bioethics within the complexity of biomedicine. In the detailed part (chapters VI-XV) the main themes of bioethics – genetic engineering, reproductive techniques, experimentation on man and on embryos, organ transplants, transsexualism, euthanasia etc., are widely discussed.

At the end of every chapter there is a broad and detailed bibliography; the

subject index and the author's index make the volume very useful for rapid consultation.

The worthy aim of the handbook is to offer methodological help to all who approach bioethics and its problems or who want a deeper knowledge of the subject. The readers will not only find, however, a panorama of the various positions on individual problems (which many other manuals of this kind often limit themselves to): they will also find the author's position clearly exposed, without ambiguity. He considers his position valid because of the reasoning supporting it; reasoning which, without mystery or feigning, recalls the personalistic philosophy, faithful both to science and to philosophical reasoning, founded on the anthropology of the totality of man.

In this philosophical tradition the author saw that it was legitimate to refer constantly to the documents of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, both because the Catholic Church's view of faith does not disturb autonomous rational reflection and because the Catholic Church's Magisterium itself has actually brought a wide and deep contribution to bioethics. Also the author felt that not to quote at least the most interesting positions of the Catholic Church and the most well known documents would have been to display a lack of informative objectivity.

Finally, what one will be able to see in every page of the manual, is the author's conviction that there cannot and must not be a conflict between scientific truth and ethical truth, so that the 'bridge to the future', which bioethics represents, can certainly lead to a new humanism, bringing into harmony the values of science and of technology and those of man's creativity and freedom as well as those of respect for his dignity and substantial integrity.

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## Nurses, Gender and Sexuality

Jan Savage, 168 pages, London, £8.95, Heinemann Nursing, 1987.

This book explores the nature of nursing as applied to all aspects of sexuality, encompassing the gender and sexuality of both nurses and patients.

The author maintains that the issue of sexuality, often brushed aside by nurse educationalists in the past, and thus nurses themselves, forms an integral part of the nurse – patient relationship. Aspects fundamental to care are explored constructively.

In the introduction, the author describes the motivating forces which led her to write this book. She wrote it primarily because she lacked information which she might otherwise have used in order to help patients following gynaecological surgery, and secondly in order to reduce the uneasiness that many nurses feel concerning this sensitive issue.

Chapter Two gives an in-depth explanation of the nature of sexuality, using arguments from disciplines allied to nursing, such as social anthropology, sociology, psychology and philosophy.

The book proceeds by discussing the concepts of erotic and non-erotic sexuality in health and illness. Related topics such as body image and self-concept are explored, followed by a description of the effects of sickness on the individual's capacity for sexual expression. Most usefully, the author includes specific suggestions as to the ways by which the sick person might still fulfil his/her sexual potential.

The author continues by tracing the history of the roles assigned to both male and female members of the nursing profession, together with the resulting sexual stereotyping which may be observed today. The author suggests that 'female' should no longer be synonymous with 'handmaiden' within a nursing sphere, and points to the confusion felt by many male doctors and patients when confronted by male nurses. The issue of homosexuality, both male and female, is raised, and the ethical aspects of this matter are highlighted; there are disturbing and thought-provoking accounts of situations where nursing care had been inadequate because of the patient's 'deviation' from the 'normal' sexual role.

The author proceeds by questioning the right of nursing and medical staff to ignore patients' need for privacy, not only in an acute hospital setting, but also in long-term institutional care, thus denying their possible wishes for any degree of intimacy with their partner.

Towards the end of the book, the emphasis shifts in order to include a presentation of a care study, focussing on expressing sexuality and utilising an appropriate nursing model in order to meet the needs of the hypothetical patient discussed.

The text is well-referenced, and suggestions for further reading are given at the end of each chapter.

In conclusion, this book would be a welcome addition to medical and nursing libraries, and, although aimed specifically at nurses, medical staff who maintain a holistic approach to care should also find this book both interesting and informative.

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## Ethics in Nursing: the Caring Relationship

Verena Tschudin, 151 pages, London,  
£7.95, Heinemann Nursing, 1986.

This book was published at a time when the nursing process (a system of individualised care comprising assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of care) had been established throughout most hospitals and in the community. The concept of nurses being in partnership with their patients, together with the increasing utilisation of medical technology, has therefore led nurses to focus upon ethical aspects of their work.

By writing this book, the author assists the nurse to gain insight into matters pertaining to nursing ethics. The first chapter sets the scene in terms of the role of the nurse today. In the second chapter, the author delves into the specific nature of the caring relationship as it affects nursing. Her arguments are well supported with valuable references.

Chapter three is devoted to the exposition of ethical theories. The author contrasts morality with ethics, and proceeds by describing the normative (prescriptive) and descriptive approaches to ethics as allied to health care. The ethical theories of consequentialism and non-consequentialism are explored together with their implications for decision-making in nursing. The case of prescribing oral contraceptives without parental consent for girls under the age of 16 is highlighted. The author completes the chapter by discussing the five principles of ethics which are applicable in many nursing situations.

The book continues by raising the topics of values, attitudes and beliefs. The author emphasises that not only

should nurses be aware of their own values, they should also understand and respect their patients' values in order for effective care to be undertaken. An overview of some professional Codes is included in the book, but it is noted that these Codes are limited in their scope to protect nurses in specific stated situations.

Detailed discussion of certain areas of ethics are put forward in the following chapters of this book, including nurses' rights and responsibilities, patient advocacy, accountability and loyalty to peers and patients. Conflicts that may arise pertaining to these areas are expanded upon.

Ethical decision-making, and the steps that the nurse must take in order for this process to happen are described in depth in the final chapters of this book. The nature of ethical dilemmas is put forward.

Overall, this book should serve to raise nurses' consciousness of the ethical issues that are constantly being met within a framework of the giving of individualised care. Nurses, especially those at the 'sharp end', ie, the bedside, will be able strongly to identify with these ethical issues.

*Ethics in Nursing* may be strongly recommended, certainly for nurses, and also for those interested in all aspects of medical and nursing ethics.

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## Human Embryos: The Debate on Assisted Reproduction

C R Austin, 183 + vii pages,  
Oxford, £6.95, Oxford University  
Press, 1989.

Inasmuch as any meaningful discussion of medical ethics must be grounded in the science and practice of the matter discussed, the first merit of C R Austin's book is that it provides that knowledge. (His competence in the field is amply evidenced by, *inter alia*, the eight volumes on *Reproduction in Mammals* which he edited with R V Short for Cambridge University Press). His first chapter gives a concise and illustrated description of the transmission of life from the formation of the gametes, egg and sperm, through fertilisation and cleavage to embryogenesis and fetal growth, with

indications of the hazards encountered on the way. His second chapter outlines the scope of variations, encouragements and diversions made possible by human intervention, with timely corrections of popular misunderstandings of 'genetic engineering', gene therapy, cloning, hybrids, chimaeras and the like. Two chapters follow on the reasons for infertility and on ways of overcoming it. A fifth chapter, on ethics and law, examines some of the ethical and pseudo-ethical objections brought against infertility treatment and pre-embryo research, and reflects on what the law might reasonably be expected to contribute to the assurance of good practice.

The facts are not presented without comment and interpretation, and the book is the better for it. Other commentators' theories on 'when life begins' (a biological question too often dressed up as an ethical question) are fairly stated; and this makes Austin's own speculation the more interesting. His words are so compact, and exactitude so necessary, that they should be quoted:

'Almost the whole of the embryo *manifestly* develops into the placenta etc, and no one can deny that, with only a small fraction becoming (eventually) the fetus. So the sequence can be stated rationally as follows: a very small part of the ovary (an oocyte, in fact) becomes an embryo, and a very small part of the embryo (the disc or plate) becomes the fetus. The inference is clear: the embryo should be regarded as an organ, like the ovary, and as such is not entitled to the respect due to something destined to become a person. The embryonic and fetal parts are easily distinguished, a notable fact being that the fetal component grows much faster than the embryo-placental component' (p18).

After rehearsing the scientific and logical difficulty in insisting on the term 'embryo' for the early conceptus during cleavage, Austin adds:

'By an alternative system, an embryo originates as a very small part of a pre-embryo, and co-exists with the pre-embryo as the latter differentiates into placenta, etc, prior to becoming a fetus' (p20).

On this basis of biological fact the chapter on ethics can discuss the attribution of 'personhood' and of human rights to the pre-implantation embryo. The understandable wish to do so can rest only on an imagined and